

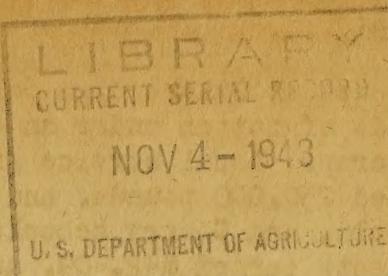
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Background Material on Farm Labor  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Extension Service

March 18, 1943

: HOW LOCAL COMMUNITIES MOBILIZED

TO GET IN THE CROPS - 1942



Hundreds of communities last year mobilized labor resources to help labor-short, machinery-short farmers save vital war crops.

It is a story of bankers pulling beets, of schools, stores, and other business institutions closed for farm work, of a preacher leading a crew of 40 boys in the field, of cotton-picking holidays, of night corn-husking and grain-shocking parties, of farmers pooling labor and equipment, of Victory Farm Work Days when the community considered it unpatriotic for able-bodied city people not to be in the fields helping.

A story of county extension agents, the U. S. Employment Service, the Farm Security Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture War Boards, school officials, city authorities, Chambers of Commerce, civic clubs, and other groups and agencies cooperating.

Above all, it is a story of farmer-city cooperation, of patriotic city people turning out to do a necessary job.

Parts of the story, community, are told in the following summaries of community effort sent in by State and county Extension Service workers. Further information can be obtained locally or through the Extension Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

ARKANSAS:

Group of 18 farmers, Fairplay community, Saline County, have formed co-operative organization to help solve labor shortage. Four own tractors, others "two-horse farmers." Have agreed on cost of using different type of equipment per hour and pay per man hour for exchange of labor. When they exchange labor, they give memo to secretary of group. At end of year farmers in debt to other farmers pay in cash, feed, etc. This arrangement last year allowed all 18 farmers to keep entire acreage in production, harvest all crops planted. Now incorporating as nonprofit farmers' service cooperative.

Five hundred volunteer workers, largely from nearby cities, helped Polk County farmers save the strawberry and blackberry crops; can 2,500,000 No. 2 cans of blackberries for sale to Government for Army and lend-lease. Later, 525 volunteers helped get in the hay crop. County divided into 12 communities; labor committees named with one farmer from each community; headquarters in county agent's office. Farmers needing labor and people willing to help registered there. Results successful; will repeat in 1943.

Local men to estimate number  
estimated to have used 300  
calories per day

CALIFORNIA:

Students at Tulare High School, Tulare County, last fall picked 1,171,000 pounds of cotton under an emergency harvest plan to help farmers get in the crop. Local service groups, business employees, and other volunteers picked 250,000 pounds, and students at Central, Wilson, Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Cherry schools picked another 949,000 pounds. For this the students earned \$42,409, and townspeople about \$5,000. Usual rate of pay was \$2 per hundred pounds. Over 10 percent of the students' earnings went into war stamps. Students released for afternoon work, transportation provided by farmers, reported amount cotton picked at school next day. Stores released percentage of employees each day during rush rather than close stores.

COLORADO:

What looked to farmers like an almost impossible job of harvesting truck crops, vegetable seed, sugar beets, carrying on livestock production, last spring in the Arkansas Valley of southeastern Colorado was done through cooperative community effort, and practically no crops were lost.

Farmer planning committees made a careful survey of labor needs and possible supply, with the county agent's office as the clearing house for farmers needing labor.

Shifting of farm labor from one community to another met much of the problem. For example, the Rocky Ford area needed its labor most in May and June for weeding onions and thinning beets. Then all possible labor was moved to the Cherew community for haying and the grain harvest. From there it was switched to onion and melon districts for the September harvest, and then to the sugar beet fields in October.

About 1,200 workers for beet thinning, onion weeding, and pea picking were imported into the area. About 700 businessmen from nearby towns of La Junta, Rocky Ford, Manzanola, and Fowler turned out to help.

When the labor exchanges got under way over 1,800 workers were being moved from field to field and area to area, wherever they were needed most at the time.

CONNECTICUT:

Boys from some of the country's most famous preparatory schools served as day laborers on farms in the towns of Milford and Orange last summer. So satisfactory was their labor that the 29 farm operators for whom they worked have voted unanimously to continue the project next summer.

The boys, mostly 16- and 17-year-olds, came from such schools as Taft, Kent, Hotchkiss, Loomis, Choate, Westminster, and Pomfret. They lived together in a labor camp and were transported to work in trucks. The camp opened on June 8, about the time most of the schools closed for summer vacation, and closed on August 28 in time to give the boys an opportunity to get ready for another school year.

Forty-five of the boys lived in a camp rented from the Girl Scouts. They worked 9 hours a day on poultry, dairy, market garden, and seed company farms. They got 37 cents an hour, out of which they paid board, camp rent, etc.

Fifty boys from Milford High School signed up for farm work; lived at home, but otherwise worked the same as the camp boys.

All the farmers who used this labor have agreed to sign up for similar help next year.

Two-thirds of the unusually heavy McIntosh apple crop in Connecticut last fall was saved largely by the help of volunteer pickers recruited from towns, cities, schools, and colleges. The Extension Service and U. S. Employment Service helped recruit and place them. Faculty members and students at the University of Connecticut picked 3,875 bushels. Thirty Yale students gave up a week's vacation for full-time orchard work. Wesleyan students helped. Students in one Southington high school picked nearly 10,000 bushels.

What the farmers say: Axel Hansen, manager of the High Brook Farm in Morris, Conn., said, "I never had my milk room cleaner than when one of the Connecticut Land Army girls worked for me this summer." Henry Mosle, another farmer, is bemoaning the loss of his dairymaid, for she returned to school on September 1. "She managed to get more milk from my Ayrshires than I could, and her gentleness with the animals was an 'eye opener' to my hired men," said Mosle. In Washington, Conn., a girl has been "peddling" milk all summer. The Litchfield County Dairy Herd Improvement Association now has three girl testers full time and a fourth part time. "The farmers like it," says Roy Newton of Kent, president of that association. "In fact, we all clean up the milk room and cow barn more often than we used to."

#### FLORIDA:

In January 1942 Lee County farmers had 300,000 bushels of Irish potatoes in the ground and 1,300 acres of gladiolus bulbs to harvest; they were clamoring for 200 additional laborers. Local planning committee, city officials, etc., staged campaign and soon pledged the 200 workers, mostly negroes.

#### GEORGIA:

Ten to 15 percent of Georgia's bumper cotton crop last fall was picked by city folks, E. C. Westbrook, cotton specialist, Extension Service, estimates. The idea of a "cotton-picking holiday" started at Barnesville, in Lamar County, which was short of labor to pick cotton before wind and rain spoiled it. The town closed down and almost every able-bodied man, woman, and child picked cotton. Nearby Gordon Military College sent students into the field. Public schools were dismissed. The idea spread, and in practically every major county in the northern half of the State, "cotton-picking holidays" were planned. Westbrook estimates

that city people and school children picked 150,000 bales of cotton during these "cotton-picking holidays."

IDAHO:

In Payette County, all business houses were closed until 4 o'clock each afternoon during the prune harvest so that employees could help save the crop. The plan was sponsored by Chamber of Commerce.

In Cassia County, schools in irrigated sections began in early August, then closed for month of September for students to help harvest potatoes and sugar beets; 250 Japanese also brought in to help; 10,000-acre potato crop and 6,000 acres of sugar beets saved.

In Jerome County 3 women rented 6-acre garden plot; produced and harvested for WPA canning kitchen 839 bushels tomatoes, 51 bushels beans, and 43 sacks corn.

In Washington County, 150 businessmen, a similar number high school students, and 175 Japanese evacuees helped harvest 85,000 acres of sugar beets, lettuce, celery, onions, and hay. Rev. Edward Cunningham, Congregational minister of Weiser and his crew of 40 volunteer boys and girls thinned 140 acres of sugar beets.

ILLINOIS:

A corps of 508 locally recruited workers in McLean County last year helped save a wartime crop of 153,000 cases of tomatoes, much of which would have been lost. Later the assistant county extension agent who helped with campaign went into Army and saw some of those canned goods unpacked at his post.

Early in year county agent set up farm labor committee. In May, 14 local labor placement posts set up, sponsored by American Legion. Farmers, urged to plant more tomatoes, produced 153,000 cases in 1942 compared to 76,000 in 1941. Could not have harvested them without the extra help.

Neighbors share labor and machines. Although he has produced at the rate of 36,885 pounds of pork a year, Chester Stein, Livingston County, has neither labor nor machinery problems. He owns a hay loader with four of his neighbors and teams up with them at hay harvest. Likewise he owns a threshing machine with his brother. At corn-picking time he furnishes the tractor and another neighbor the picker. In 1941, with only 15 days of labor, he produced 4,700 bushels of corn, 3,250 bushels of oats, 36,885 pounds of pork, 1,702 dozens of eggs, and 48,594 pounds of milk.

INDIANA:

Tipton County farmers in 1942 were able to harvest a soybean crop almost double the 1941 crop, largely because of a plan for cooperative use of harvesting machinery and labor. All but about 6 percent of the 15,400-acre crop was in by November 15.

When neighborhood leaders were organized in the county, one man in each community was selected as a community cooperator. He was responsible for getting his neighbors to exchange use of labor, machinery, and transportation. The community cooperator called his neighbors together, worked out cooperative ways of getting the crop harvested by custom use of harvesting machinery, exchange of labor, machinery, etc.

LOUISIANA:

Hundreds of teen-age school children in West Carroll Parish started to school a month late so they could help get in the crop of badly needed long-staple cotton. They went to school 6 days a week to make up for the late opening of school. Schools of the county are expected to close May 1 so the children can go back to the fields to help dig potatoes and chop cotton.

Farmers in Terrebonne Parish this year have planted six times as many snap beans as last year to help meet war food needs. They also have planted 30,000 acres of potatoes. They have worked out plans with school officials to hold school on Saturdays so the term can finish May 15 instead of May 28, thus releasing the school children to help harvest the crop. Harvesting will begin about May 1, and from then on schools will be dismissed early every afternoon so the boys and girls can get in several hours of picking before dark.

MARYLAND:

Four hundred boys from Baltimore, beginning last April, were carried to the McDonogh School (15 miles from Baltimore) for special training in farm work each Saturday until school closed in June. At the end of the training period, 335 were considered available for farm work, and most of them were placed on farms for summer or worked in groups for shorter periods in rush harvest seasons.

In Montgomery County, Md., schoolboys from the District of Columbia were given training for three week ends. The boys were divided into groups of 25, each with an instructor, and sent to farms where they were given practice in various kinds of farm tasks. They were quartered in four schools, each with a vocational agriculture teacher as supervisor. The largest number of boys on the job at any one time was 126, and the smallest number during the summer vacation period was 68. They were paid 25 cents an hour plus their noon meal. Reports from farmers receiving this help were favorable, and plans for repeating it on a larger scale are being made for this summer.

MICHIGAN:

The Commercial Club of Fowlerville last year registered 400 volunteers, clerks, salesmen, bankers, druggists, etc., who were willing to do emergency farm work. These men worked holidays, evenings, whenever they could give 2 hours or more to farm work. They cultivated crops, helped plant grain, operated machines, helped harvest grain, hay, sugar

beets, and did other farm jobs. They became known as "the Flying Farm Squadron," moving from farm to farm where they were needed most. They will do the same work in 1943.

MINNESOTA:

From the little town of Goodhue (population 500) last year, 35 merchants and other businessmen volunteered to help farmers get in the crops. One local merchant worked 600 hours during the summer. As part of a labor recruitment campaign the Commercial Club signed up volunteers. The county agricultural agent helped place the workers on farms needing them the most. Seventy-two harvest hands from outside the community were brought in and placed in cooperation with the Employment Service.

Excerpt from a letter in 1942 from a Hastings farm woman to the Department of Agriculture:

"A group of 15 town women and two men (who work on night shifts in a flour mill) are the people who are saving the thousands of bushels of fine apples on our farm this year - saving them at a time when every bit of food is so badly needed. They were located through the Victory Aides of the OCD. They are a splendid group of workers, doing this job - not for the pay check only - but because they feel they are doing a vital war service. When our apple crop is finally picked, I plan to develop this local experiment further, with an eye to seeing what can be done to prepare our town people to help on farms next year.. It will have to be a whole community undertaking."

"These are all married women with little families. Before they come to the farm at 9 a.m. they wash clothes, get breakfast, get little children off to school, put up lunches for their husbands. They get home about 5:30, by their own choice, to get supper, put little folks to bed, and even can apples until midnight or later. And yet farmers think these town people 'can't take it.' They have shown my husband and me that they certainly can be of enormous assistance in meeting the shortage of farm labor."

MONTANA:

Faced with an acute shortage of labor and some 4,100 acres of sugar beets to be got out of the ground before freezing last fall, the people of Rosebud County went to work.

Harvesting beets is called "stoop" labor, the hardest kind of work. A central labor committee, composed of a local banker, the county agricultural agent, a sugar company field man, a U. S. Employment Service representative, and the school superintendent, launched a farm-labor survey to determine labor needs and a recruitment campaign to meet those needs.

Volunteer city residents and school children harvested 23,500 tons of beets, nearly half the total crop. At the peak of the season 200 school children and 50 businessmen were working. About 30 Japanese, 50 Mexicans, 20 Negroes, and 70 Indians from a nearby reservation, farm families, and some additional full-time help got in the rest of the crop.

NEBRASKA:

Lee J. Ferris, near Archer in Merrick County, helped meet the labor shortage at grain-harvesting time last fall by running three 8-hour shifts a day. Two hired men ran the tractor and grain binder from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mr. Ferris and John Twinbul (a 13-year-old boy from town) took over from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and then Mr. Ferris's sons, Elvin and George, pushed on through to 6 a.m. The 400 acres were cut at the rate of 50 to 60 acres a day.

Young boys 12 and 13 can gather corn, County Agent Howard Peterson of Buffalo County said. He took 16 to a nearby farm, and the first day they picked 245 bushels. Small wooden baskets and other methods of picking the corn had to be devised. The boys earned from \$1 to \$1.50 a day; more important, they got in the corn.

NEW HAMPSHIRE:

Winfield L. Shaw, New Boston, former businessman retired to the farm, is making possible efficient operation of land owned by 24 families in the community.

In 1937, seeing need for farm machinery, he suggested cooperative ownership of one set of farm machines for use of all farmers in community; financed undertaking. Persons (including Mr. Shaw) using machinery pay a fixed charge. They have paid back \$1,400 of original cost of \$2,200. Equipment now producing Food for Freedom, being used by number of part-time farmers.

The farm of Rennie Baer, Rollinsford, agricultural community, is the center of a hummin farm tractor service. Charles Tuttle operates tractor, doing most of the machine work on 6 nearby farms. Last year he cut nearly 700 acres of hay; plowed and harrowed 150 acres; plowed 100 more acres for vegetable gardens; sawed 100 cords of wood; hauled manure; etc.

H. A. Hudson, Hinsdale, with one set of machinery has taken over entire job of haying for 15 small farms; does other heavy machinery work for them on custom basis.

NEW JERSEY:

Eleven high school boys last summer helped Wallace S. Suydam, of Quakertown save 40 acres of tomatoes. The boys lived in an old building in Quakertown; were carried 2 miles to a church parsonage for meals and to the farm for work. They worked under a group supervisor.

NEW MEXICO:

In Dona Ana County, school children harvested 20 percent of a cotton crop of 58,300 acres - nearly half of which was long staple - badly needed for the war. Schools closed for 30 days.

Schools in Otero County closed on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of each week during fruit and vegetable harvesttime so that school children could help with the harvest.

NORTH DAKOTA:

Nels Overbo, Northfield township, is an example of how farmers are meeting the farm labor shortage. Nels and his son, Selmer, run a 400-acre farm. He has worked out a scheme for loading and threshing grain which he says allows a crew of 9 men and 1 team to do the work of 15 men and 8 teams. Neighbors made up the 9-men crew, and the Overbos have threshed 3,000 acres of grain this season for themselves and 6 neighbors.

OKLAHOMA:

In Adair County, 3,500 pickers, all local people, pitched in last May and saved an \$80,000 strawberry crop that would have been lost. The berries had to be picked about May 4, when sugar rationing caused the market to go to pieces. Processing plants could not handle the berries unless they had barrels. Barrels were hard to get. The pickers were advised each morning by the county agricultural agent through a radio station where barrels were available and where to go to pick that day.

OREGON:

When that blackberry crop around Newberg, in the Willamette Valley, ripened last year with no labor to pick it, stores and other business houses stayed closed until noon so businessmen and employees could help pick the crop. Business in town simply started at noon and continued until 8 p.m. The berry crop was saved, and the Chamber of Commerce secretary reported that the merchants sold as much during the shortened hours as they ordinarily did in the full day.

School children in groups of 30 each, under a teacher, worked on farms in Marion County last summer. County Agent Robert Rieder says they harvested a considerable part of the county's 28,000 acres of fruits and vegetables. Before school was out last spring the county farm labor committee and school officials had arranged a special farm work course which was taken by 10,000 school children. When school was out the groups of children were assigned to certain jobs in certain communities, the farmer arranging for transportation. The Marion County plan of advanced training is being extended to other areas this spring.

SOUTH DAKOTA:

Last August farmers in Walworth County faced the problem of harvesting a grain crop four times larger than in 1941 with an acute shortage of labor and machinery.

All machinery in the county had been put in good shape. Fullest use was made of the 40 grain combines in the county. Signs on the roads and "spotters" announced to all combines going north that help was needed; 30 power combines were stopped and got into the fields just

in time. "Shock troops" of businessmen, boys, and girls were mustered from Mobridge and other towns to help set up the crop behind the combines. They set up 6,000 acres. Women, girls, and boys living on the farms were credited with shocking 40 percent of the crop. A very large share of the crop was saved.

About 1,200 students at the South Dakota State College, during a 2-week farm work recess from classes last October, scattered out over the State to work on farms. Most of the students went back to the home farm to help, but others were placed through the U. S. Employment Service.

TENNESSEE:

In Henry County the city of Paris (population 10,000) closed down all business one day last fall and literally the entire town turned out to help farmers harvest their crops in an area that was being taken over for an Army camp.

TEXAS:

Schools closed for 3 weeks at onion transplanting time early this year in Zapata County. Transient labor usually has planted 2,000 acres of onions, but at transplanting time no extra labor was available. Farmers employed the school teachers to act as supervisors; paid the children by the row. Farmers not busy on their own farms joined in, and the crop was transplanted in surprisingly short time, County Agent W. H. Gardner reports.

UTAH:

To meet shortage of labor and threshing machines, 10 farmers in Utah County last fall pooled their labor, teams, and wagons and selected a thresher operator. The group got in the crop for all 10 farmers in 9 days. No extra help was hired.

In Rich County, storekeepers in five towns used their stores as registration places for men who could help harvest grain and women who could help feed the crews. Local campaigns urged city people to help. County agent helped place them on farms. The hay crop was saved.

In Weber County, school busses picked up volunteer workers and took them to farms. They carried 615 workers who helped harvest sweet cherries, 216 to beet fields, 200 to sour cherry and apricot orchards, 40 to help pick beans.

VERMONT:

Several hundred granite workers in Washington County signed up with County Agent Loveless and the U. S. Employment Service to work during their off hours to help farmers save their crops. Farmers placed requests for this help with the Employment Service or the county agent, and the workers were paid the prevailing farm wage.

About 2,000 Vermont high school students last summer signed up to work in sugar and apple orchards. Farmers reported the work quite satisfactory. They were recruited by the schools in cooperation with the U. S. Employment Service and county extension agents.

In a published report on the Volunteer Land Corps, Summer 1942, by Arthur Root, Executive Officer, Root states that 626 eastern college and high school boys and girls were placed on Vermont and New Hampshire farms. Of the total, 550 were boys and 76 girls. Nearly 80 percent, he says, made good and also completed their work agreements with farmers. Those "making good" were 425 boys and 71 girls. The recruits were carefully chosen from 2,500 applicants. The age limit was 16 for boys and 18 years for girls.

WASHINGTON:

About 1,600 carloads of apples were hanging on trees in the Wenatchee-Okanogan district of central Washington last September. The transient laborers that normally picked this \$20,000,000 crop had gone to war or industry. The crop had to be saved by people throughout the valley mobilizing to do the job. First, boy students were excused from classes to help. Office workers, clerks, men, and women worked part of each day. When that wasn't enough, stores and business offices closed for several weeks. Housewives worked together - one caring for the children while several others picked fruit. Schools closed down; colleges and universities released several hundred students. Public-spirited citizens put up prizes, war bonds, etc., for students who could pick the most apples. City people living in nearby cities - Spokane, Seattle, Tacoma, Everett - took off a few days or a week and helped. Soldiers from a nearby camp gave some help. An army of Indians from a nearby reservation answered the call for help. The hunting season was changed to encourage hunters to help in the emergency and hunt later.

Fruit growers, already tired from a summer of orcharding with partial crews, worked from dawn to dark teaching newcomers the tricks of the trade. They opened their homes to give the volunteers a place to eat and sleep. On days when stores were closed it was unpatriotic to be seen on the streets during daylight hours. The whole district was mobilized and nearly all of the apples were saved.

WEST VIRGINIA:

A "Victory Work Day" one day a week during the harvest season was set aside at Nicholas County High School, Summersville, last fall. All students and teachers were asked to help harvest crops which farmers otherwise could not have saved. Special arrangements were made to carry students and teachers to nearby farms. When results were compiled the high school crews had harvested 2,558 bushels of garden produce, shucked 2,838 bushels of corn, hauled 1,123 bushels, and done many other jobs.

Old-fashioned corn-husking bees, 16 of them, helped meet the farm labor problem in Tucker County last October. It all started from a farewell

party for two boys going into the Army. The 4-H Club boys arranged to have the party held at night so they could get more school children out. A 10-acre field was husked and the corn hauled to the crib by midnight. The next night 250 more bushels were husked on a nearby farm, and so on until the husking bees had been held for the entire community and everybody had had a good time doing it.

WISCONSIN:

Night grain-shocking parties by local businessmen helped farmers save the grain crop last summer in Walworth County, Wis. It started when County Agent James Beattie's office received calls for help from farmers and suggested a shocking party one night to clean up a 15-acre field of barley. They cleaned up the field that night. Some 205 "city farmers" were recruited and as many as 10 grainfields were cleaned up in one night. In Elkhorn alone, merchants, dentists, doctors, and other professional and business men worked 1,500 man-hours and shocked 1,500 acres of grain.

WYOMING:

When Hot Springs County farmers could not get in the sugar beet crop last fall for lack of labor, the town of Thermopolis closed stores two forenoons and three afternoons and schools closed at 2 p.m. for 10 days so all could work. This provided 200 man days work and 750 student days. All but about 45 acres of the beet crop was saved.

